

Releasing Negative Emotions Into Emptiness

Do you sometimes feel oppressed by negative emotions such as fear, anxiety, anger, shame, worthlessness, or depression? Are you open to discover a way to manage them – and *transcend* them – that requires no medication nor years of psychotherapy? I have good news for you.

Ancient wisdom traditions of the East – such as Buddhism, Hinduism, Daoism – have put a lot of study into the human body and mind, for thousands of years, with the goal of transcending human suffering. With centuries of devoted experiments, revelations, and insight, they discovered that all these negative emotions are not natural to our *true being* – they belong to the realm of the ego, our mistaken identity.

Following a certain set of contemplative practices and some lifestyle tweaks, these masters discovered their true being, and saw that in *this* place the negative emotions do not live. Out of their compassion and sense of oneness with all beings, they then spent their life teaching us how to find this space of freedom, of peace, of bliss. The insights and techniques that I share in this article come from the Buddhist traditions, and the teachings of Sri Ramana Maharshi.

Dissolving Negative Emotions

Every single thought, feeling or sensation that we have is, by its very nature, impermanent. It comes and goes. It comes from emptiness, exists for a small period of time inside our system, and then subsides again into emptiness. If you would simply perceive everything that happens to you (and *in you*) as a temporary phenomena inside you consciousness, see it for what it is, and let it go when it goes, you would not have any problems. Basically, all suffering would disappear.

But, of course, that is not how our mind usually operates. We normally react – and in a very personal level – to everything that we perceive. We create stories, interpretations, and turn every little happening into a stitch in the fabric of our personality, our identity. We then meet the world and suffer through the lenses of this limited identity. Without questioning who we truly are, and without understanding the nature of thoughts and mind, we feel oppressed by our own feelings, and build walls of separation and limitation with our beliefs and attachments. This is the state of most people in this world.

From the enlightened point of view, however, we are simply pure consciousness, and everything that happens is just a movement of energy inside of us, like images projected on the cinema screen. The screen is not burned by images of fire, nor cut by images of a sword. Therefore, the surest way to dissolve any suffering, any negative emotion, back into emptiness, is to realize who we truly are. To remember – and *experience* – that we are the cinema screen, and *not* the images projected on it.

Let's take **fear** as an example. The ultimate cause for your fear is your identification with the small self (the ego), and your attachment to your ideas and desires. Fix this, and fear will be impossible. Postpone looking at this, and all you get is symptom treatment. Fear has, for sure, effects in our body, emotions, and energy – and many times it's helpful to treat it in this level via bodywork, therapy, energy healing, or even medication. Sometimes without these treatments we are so distracted by the symptoms of fear that we can't even have the head space to look deeper into it. But, ultimately, we need to tackle the fundamental cause of fear.

“Ok, that's great! Now how can I work my negative emotions at the root? Give me some practical hints.” I'm glad you asked. Let's continue with the example of fear. Let's say that you are having a conversation with a friend, with your partner, or with a colleague, and suddenly the fear of rejection comes up inside you. Excellent, this is a great opportunity to practice. Depending on your needs, and level of maturity (self-knowledge), take one of these two approaches below.

Seeing Clearly

I like to call this the **L-I-E-R method** (label, introspect, examine, release), because it deals directly with the negative feeling and the lie it carries. It's not a pretty word but does the job as a mnemonic device.

1. **Label.** Recognize that fear has arisen, and label it in your mind. The words you use are important. Don't say "I'm afraid" or "I have fear"; instead say "fear has arisen", or "fear is here". Do you see how just changing the words already creates a different perspective and more space?
2. **Introspect.** Take one to three deep breaths, and bring your attention inside yourself – this means don't pay attention to the object, person or circumstance that triggered the emotion, but rather attend to the emotion itself. Accept that the feeling is there.
3. **Examine.** Study the feeling deeply: its causes, effects, and nature. Here are some questions to guide your contemplation:
 - Causes: what exactly triggered this feeling in this moment? There is no need to go to the remote causes of it in your childhood or whatever. For now just stay with what's happening right here. Once you find the core assumptions or mindsets that are at the root of the feeling, challenge them: is this the only way to see this situation? Is this an empowering way of looking at things?
 - Effects: how does it feel in my body? Where does the feeling reside in my body? What memories and thoughts swim around this feeling in my mind? What are my thoughts and feelings about this feeling?
 - Nature: Look inside and ask yourself "what is this feeling?" Don't use words to explain, just keep the question alive. Does this feeling have a substance, a color, a size? What is it made of? What's the vibration of it? Contemplate how this feeling is impermanent. It was not here a few minutes ago – where did it come from? It will not be here after a few minutes – where will it disappear into?
 - Spend as much time as you need in step three. Learn as much as possible about the negative feeling. We are slaves of what we don't understand. See if this emotion is the real problem, or if it is something else underneath it.
4. **Release.** Let it be whatever it is – but don't create stories and interpretations around it. And let it go. I can't tell you *how* to let go, but intuitively every human being knows how.

The outcome of this process is fourfold: **clarity** (about what the emotion is); **composure** (to be with the feeling without being overwhelmed); **self-knowledge** (understanding the nature of the emotion, the triggers, and the effects in your body); **liberation** (a sense of separation between the emotion and yourself).

For step number three, you may encounter certain concepts or assumptions that are at the root of the negative feeling. Or perhaps certain subconscious "decisions" of looking at things a certain way. In this example (fear of rejection), it may be self-judgement

about your feeling of worth, or perhaps an attachment to an idea that you need the approval of certain person to “confirm” that you are worthy of love and value. It may be useful, here, to spend some more time and thoroughly challenge these assumptions and choices.

In some cases, also, the emotion is indeed pointing out to something that needs some attention in your life; then you may need to take some external action, to change something. The “external fixing” does not prevent this internal process, nor does going through this process requires any external passivity.

After going through this you may find that the negative emotion has already disappeared, lost power, or transformed into something else. If not, you can move on to the next exercise (Returning to Emptiness), or practice contemplating the opposite quality (more about this down below).

Returning to Emptiness

I like to call this the **L-I-F-E method** (label, introspect, find, experience), because in here we don't deal directly with the negative energy, nor try to learn from it, but simply return to the “inner life” of pure consciousness, as naturally detached and untouched.

1. **Label.** Recognize that fear has arisen, and accept it for what it is.
2. **Introspect.** Turn your attention inward, and ask yourself “Who is afraid?” Who is the one that is affected by the fear? Who are you that perceives the fear?
 - Take it slow. Don't assume – actually do the looking. Use these questions to bring all your attention inside, towards yourself, the subject and experiencer of the fear. This subject is the ego, your identity, or who you think you are. Spend time keeping the attention here, in this space.
 - If your focus is intense and persistent, at this point you have already forgotten about the fear. But keep on.
3. **Find** your center. Ask yourself, “Who am I?” Reject any answer that your mind gives you, because you are aware of your mind (and all its products), therefore you cannot be your mind. You are aware of your shirt, so you are not your shirt – it is an object of your perception. You are aware of your body, so you are not your body. You are aware of your fear, so you are not your fear. You are aware even of this mental process, so it's not you. Who are you, who is aware of all these things

4. **Experience** yourself beyond the fear. Is this space of awareness afraid? Is it male or female? Does it have a shape? A substance? A nationality?

You may use these techniques one after another, or individually. In any case, clear understanding is very important. You cannot overcome what you are not aware of, what you don't recognize. As your self-knowledge becomes more sharp and habitual, however, you will be able to jump directly into dissolving back to emptiness.

I don't want to spoil your discovery, but if you follow this through long enough, and deep enough, you will discover your true position as the witness of everything, fearless awareness itself. There is no suffering in here.

Contemplate the Opposite

Another practice that Buddhism suggests is to contemplate the opposite quality. Our mind is unable to hold on to two thoughts at the same time – especially opposite thoughts. At most it can quickly switch between them, but at any given moment it's only busy with *one* thing. So, if you are feeling fear, and you make an effort to contemplate fearlessness and courage (both the thought and the feeling of it), fear will subside. If you are feeling sad, contemplate gratitude; if angry, contemplate compassion and love; etc.

That is why practicing [Loving-Kindness](#) stops us from having negative feelings towards ourselves (unworthiness, self-criticism, lack of self-esteem, etc.) and others (hostility, hatred, anger) – because we are cultivating love for ourselves and others.

Freedom of Mind

With the *Returning to Emptiness* technique, you will get the ability to simply dissolve any troublesome thought or negative emotion in a couple of seconds, by simply looking at it and remembering your true position. What a powerful freedom this is!

Don't expect to achieve this level of mastery in a couple of weeks, though. It takes time, and the process is hugely helped if you keep a daily seated meditation practice. There are [many types of meditation](#) that you can try; but in my experience [Self-Enquiry](#) (or "I Am Meditation") is the one that is most helpful to develop *Returning to Emptiness*. This process works not only when dealing with fear, but also with most other negative emotions, because of all them come from a single cause: the forgetfulness of our true being, and identification with the ego and mind. And it's more

effective when you use it whenever the negative feeling comes up, then and there, or immediately after – and not in retrospective.

So, this is the invitation that I have for you...

Break free from the shackles you have made for yourself. Go beyond the ego with all its limitations and suffering. You are the space of Being; you are pure consciousness. Suffering is not natural to you – peace and freedom is. Discover that, be that. This is the teaching of the ancient sages.

Finally, if you enjoyed reading this post, you may also like the article on [22 Life Secrets of Self-Fulfillment](#).

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